

# NUNS, TERTIARIES, AND QUASI-RELIGIOUS: THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF LATE MEDIEVAL HOLY WOMEN

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In her landmark essay, "Creating and Recreating Communities of Women: The Case of Corpus Domini, Ferrara, 1406-1452," Mary Martin McLaughlin recounts the creation and early history of a community of pious laywomen, and its eventual—and contested—reorganization into two enclosed monastic communities. Each accepted an approved religious rule which associated it with a major religious order, the Augustinians in one case, and the Order of Saint Clare in the other. The community of Corpus Domini proved a singularly useful case for historical analysis because a rich cache of documents allowed McLaughlin to trace its fortunes with a degree of detail often impossible for other women's communities. Although published in 1989, McLaughlin's essay still stands as the most exciting piece of scholarship I can think of chronicling the transformation of a group of pious laywomen, who possessed a relative degree of freedom, into regularized nuns subject to formal ecclesiastical supervision.<sup>1</sup>

McLaughlin's conclusions regarding Corpus Domini raise issues that are relevant far beyond this single fifteenth-century community in Ferrara, Italy. One of the explicit goals of her essay, in fact, was to motivate scholars, and medievalists in particular, to think more deeply about the complexities surrounding the creation and institutional expressions of women's religious communities. Indeed, the issues at stake for the women of Corpus Domini echo concerns apparent in the individual lives and communities of western European religious women from the eleventh century onward.

In this essay, I draw on McLaughlin's well-documented story to explore in particular the lives of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscan and Umbrian women known to us primarily through hagiographic *vitae*, or saints' lives. McLaughlin's essay suggests critical questions that might be brought to these women's lives: Why are the religious affiliations of so many late medieval women so difficult to define? Why do so many of these women pursue their religious lives

as laywomen rather than as members of religious houses or orders subject to an approved religious rule? Why do many women shift from one religious lifestyle or affiliation to another? Such questions are especially pertinent for understanding late medieval holy women, for in each case, they contrast with their male contemporaries whose religious identities are, by and large, easy to define: men tend to pursue religious life as members of recognized religious orders rather than as laymen and they tend also to remain stable within their chosen orders. I explore these questions vis-à-vis women based primarily upon saints' *vitae* which, except in the cases of a few well-known individuals such as Clare of Assisi (d. 1253) and Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), are the only or principal texts we have documenting their lives. This differentiates my study from McLaughlin's, for she incorporated evidence from a substantial variety of documents including foundation documents, bequests, letters, legal appeals and opinions, a testament, and spiritual texts. McLaughlin's more complete story of the women of Corpus Domini, however, helps us to think imaginatively about many of the now lost details regarding earlier medieval women, providing a welcome *terra firma* for speculating about and attempting to reconstruct the stories of their religious lives.

#### CORPUS DOMINI: AVENUES OF INQUIRY PERTINENT TO EARLIER ITALIAN WOMEN

Although McLaughlin ostensibly focuses on the single community of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, she has, in fact, discussed three communities by the conclusion of her essay. She begins by describing the origins of a pious group of laywomen, then discusses a splinter group that formed a new monastic foundation, and subsequently recounts how a second monastic foundation superseded the original community of laywomen at Corpus Domini. The over-riding theme linking all three groups regards the choice the women face: remaining as laywomen or accepting regularization and becoming monastic nuns. To put it another way, the women had to choose what we might term their religious identity or status. Other factors—and sometimes competing values—they needed to consider included the preservation of their independence, their economic stability, ecclesiastical recognition, and their social status. In this



essay, I explore how attention to these very same issues elucidates our understanding of Italian women in the two centuries prior to Corpus Domini's foundation. I offer this discussion as a first step toward reconstructing some of the reasons behind the breath-taking diversity of women's religious life and communities in the two centuries prior to the Corpus Domini controversy chronicled by McLaughlin.

### CORPUS DOMINI IN ITS EARLY YEARS

Bernardina Sedazzari founded the community of Corpus Domini in 1406. Despite initially stating her intention to found a "monastery" of nuns bound by the Rule of Augustine, the fiercely independent Bernardina consistently resisted ecclesiastical pressures to subject the women to a rule, vows, or even the formal status of "veiled virgins" throughout her eighteen years of leadership.<sup>2</sup> Why she ever said she wanted to found a monastery adhering to the Rule of Augustine remains a mystery. Perhaps it was a political ploy to make her foundation more palatable to authorities, or perhaps she simply changed her mind in the course of establishing her community. Whatever the case, her subsequent actions and words strongly suggest that Bernardina, as McLaughlin put it, "preferred autonomy to authority and wished most of all to preserve the independence of the community she regarded as her creation and her property."<sup>3</sup> Just before her death in 1425, Bernardina gave explicit instructions to her loyal follower and chosen heir, Lucia Mascheroni, "to defend, maintain and improve' the community in the form in which it had existed," thus enjoining Lucia to preserve Corpus Domini as a house of laywomen.<sup>4</sup>

Bernardina covered the costs of the foundation through use of a dowry given to her by her maternal aunt, along with funds provided by friends and by women who joined the community, including Lucia Mascheroni. But money was always a problem for the middle-class community of Corpus Domini, which never gained the steady income or patronage necessary to sustain it as a stable, thriving religious house. Wealthy patricians and nobles tended to support monastic foundations, which is where their own daughters, sisters, and mothers were likely to settle as religious.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the early Corpus Domini remained very much a local religious house; while

respected, its influence never extended into the upper echelons of secular or ecclesiastical society. Indeed, our historical memory of this early lay community would probably have been all but lost had it not been preserved in the documents of the two thriving monastic foundations which eventually emerged as Corpus Domini's only surviving heirs.

After Bernardina's death, a prolonged and intricate battle over the form of this early community ensued, lasting from 1425 until 1452. It involved disaffections and dissensions among the women themselves; outside arbitrations and interventions involving prelates, local clerics, and the archbishop of Ravenna; a failed attempt at compromise; and a bitter legal dispute over the ownership of community property. By 1452, the lay community had ceased to exist entirely, as I explain below.

#### SANT'AGOSTINO

The first monastic house to arise from Corpus Domini was founded in 1426, just one year after Bernardina's death, by Ailisia de Baldo, a member of Corpus Domini who tried to wrest control of the community away from Lucia. Ailisia wanted to establish a monastic house following the Rule of Augustine, in effect, doing what Bernardina had originally claimed she would do almost twenty years earlier. When an awkward compromise imposed by high-ranking prelates fell apart, Ailisia left Corpus Domini with a group of followers to found a new house, Sant'Agostino. Placed directly under the Holy See, the house preserved some independence since it was exempted from episcopal intervention, but nevertheless became subject to ecclesiastical supervision. It prospered impressively through local gifts of property, lay patronage and bequests, ecclesiastical privileges, and a flourishing membership, including many women from prominent Ferrarese families. Sant'Agostino's influence grew in tandem with these successes, making it a noted center of reform for other Augustinian monasteries in the region.<sup>6</sup>

#### CORPUS DOMINI IN ITS LATER YEARS

The second monastic house to emerge from Bernardina's lay foundation was Corpus Domini itself, beginning sometime around the late 1420s. In this instance, it was a wealthy laywoman from outside



of the community, Verde Pio da Carpi, who led the revolt against Bernardina's wishes. Some scholars, including McLaughlin, believe that Caterina Vegri (aka Catherine of Bologna), a member of Corpus Domini, cryptically included Verde Pio in her *Le sette armi spirituali* when she denounced people guilty of "the damnable and pestiferous striving of worldly ambition" who disturbed Corpus Domini's peaceful love.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the truth of this claim, Verde Pio used her considerable connections with high-ranking Ferrarese society and within religious circles, including the papacy, to transform Corpus Domini into a regular religious house. Investing a considerable sum of her own money in a new building program, she successfully lobbied the papacy around 1429-31 to release Lucia from her promise to Bernardina to defend Corpus Domini's lay status. Lucia was promptly deposed as Corpus Domini's leader and the house was put under the Urbanist Rule of Saint Clare. This dramatic change was supported by a reinforcement of nuns from the Clarisse monastery in Mantua. These conveniently included Pio Verde's own blood-sister, Taddea, who was probably elected as the monastery's first abbess in 1432. There followed a brutal, prolonged, and fascinating fight between Lucia and the new Clarisse leadership and their backers, but for our purposes it suffices to know that sometime between 1446 and 1452, Lucia fully renounced her rights over Corpus Domini, a move ratified by the papacy in 1452. By that time, Corpus Domini had become a "well-disciplined and well-endowed monastery" that included lower and middling ranks of women, but was dominated especially by women from patrician and noble families. Similar to the trajectory of Sant'Agostino, this later Corpus Domini became a powerful reformist center for Clarisse monasteries throughout the region.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF THIRTEENTH- AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY WOMEN

The contest among these fifteenth-century religious women points to similar issues already at stake among thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian women—whether to remain lay or become regularized, and how to achieve the interdependent and sometimes competing goals of autonomy, economic stability, ecclesiastical recognition, and social status. Focusing on the flourishing religious life of Tuscany and Umbria in this period, one finds some twenty-

three holy women for whom relatively early and significant *vitae* can be located. For purposes of comparison, one finds in the same place and period some twenty-one holy men.<sup>9</sup>

Who are these women and men and how might we describe them religiously? One first notes the regular and relatively stable religious status of the men, in contrast to the irregular status and shifting affiliations of the women. Of the twenty-one men, fully seventeen were "regular," that is, they belonged to communities following an approved religious rule.<sup>10</sup> All of these men belonged to orders that were unenclosed. Thus they performed a variety of services in the world, including preaching, administering the sacraments, performing other pastoral works, teaching, and assisting the sick and needy. The remaining four men were also unenclosed: two were Franciscan tertiaries,<sup>11</sup> one was a layman who appears to have followed no rule,<sup>12</sup> and another was a hermit, also unaffiliated with any religious order or rule.<sup>13</sup> Of all these men, only two ever changed their religious affiliations, John of Alverna who lived as a child with the Regular Canons of Saint Augustine, then transferred as a young man to the Franciscans, and Jacopone of Todi who was a penitent loosely associated with the Franciscans and who later entered the order. Of course, many of the men began their religious trajectory first as "penitents" before they joined or, in the case of men such as Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) and Alex Falconieri (d. 1310), founded religious orders. By changing religious affiliations, I am referring to clear and conscious shifts in status from one generally recognized form of religious life—such as solitary, hermit, or layperson identifiably associated with a mendicant order—to another, rather than to a short-lived religious lifestyle that quickly and almost organically drifts into a more institutionally identifiable status.

While the seventeen men belonging to orders were subject to ecclesiastical authority, the fact that they were unenclosed, largely itinerant, and able to participate in an array of pastoral and social services meant that they had certain freedoms and a modicum of autonomy unavailable to enclosed monks with vows of stability. As members of the relatively new and socially popular orders such as the Franciscans or Servites (Servants of Maria), they also enjoyed the economic benefits that came to them via gifts, bequests, and fees, as



well as the sorts of religious and social influence that attached to their new positions in religious institutions and schools.

The women, by contrast, are highly "irregular." Only three of the twenty-three women can be identified simply as enclosed nuns or sisters—"simply" in the sense that in each case, the woman's first and enduring religious affiliation was with a religious house or institution that was subject to an approved religious rule.<sup>14</sup> For example, Sperandea of Gubbio (d. ca. 1276) founded a house governed by the Rule of Benedict, Giovanna (Vanna) of Orvieto (d. 1306) joined a Dominican house under the Rule of Augustine, and Margaret of Faenza (d. 1330) joined a Vallombrosan house following the Rule of Benedict. There are other women besides these who lived as enclosed women for a portion, even a significant amount of their lives. Unlike Sperandea, Vanna, or Margaret, however, they shifted between or among various religious lifestyles; a woman might begin, for example, as a solitary before then joining a religious community and, perhaps later, adopting yet another type of religious life. I will return to these multiply-affiliated women below.

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Two other "nuns" one might add to this first group raise the knotty issue of terminology.<sup>15</sup> The wide variety of individual and communal lifestyles of late medieval women makes it challenging to identify their religious status with clear, unambiguous religious terminology. For example, although the early *Corpus Domini* community was certainly lay, documents describe it variously as a monastery—a term traditionally reserved for houses of nuns—an "oratorio," "ospizio," or "mansione."<sup>16</sup> The very variety of terms used to denote *Corpus Domini* suggests how difficult it is to define it as a discrete type of religious life. This problem of naming pious women and their communities, when they had them, is even more acute when one considers thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women. Scholars have too often avoided and, in the process, effaced the messier features of religious and institutional history by facilely sweeping individuals into deceptively simple categories such as "nun" or "tertiary." Such classifications prove problematic, particularly for women, who often spent their religious lives outside of regularized monastic houses.

The case of the Camaldolese nun, Gherardesca of Pisa (d. 1270), illustrates the elasticity of the category "nun" in this period. Married, Gherardesca wished to leave the world to live in a monastery. After convincing her husband to join her, the two were received into the community of Camaldolese monks at the monastery of San Savino. The abbot clothed them both in the "habit of holy religion."<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere called the "habit of the monastery," the garb is specifically described in Gherardesca's case as "nun's robes."<sup>18</sup> As might be expected of a Camaldolese nun, Gherardesca prayed the divine office (although we should bear in mind that the same was true of many pious laywomen in this period).<sup>19</sup> The fact that she resided in a cell [*cellula*] outside the men's monastery rather than with other Camaldolese nuns could be explained by the lack of other Camaldolese women in the city and the order's own eremitical tradition.<sup>20</sup> In specifically Camaldolese parlance, Gherardesca is indeed a "nun," albeit one who stretches conventional understandings of medieval nuns, usually thought to be coenobitic. Other features of Gherardesca's life liken her much more to a semi-enclosed recluse than even an eremitic Camaldolese nun. Although the thirteenth-century Camaldolese were known for their rigorous observance of silence, Gherardesca frequently received visitors and spoke freely with them.<sup>21</sup> Her own visits to churches and to non-Camaldolese monk-acquaintances outside San Savino show that Gherardesca could come and go from her cell.<sup>22</sup> Her freedom can perhaps best be understood in light of changing assumptions regarding religious solitude and separation from the world. Mendicants, recluses, and, apparently, hermit nuns increasingly alternated between separation from and insertion within human society in this period.<sup>23</sup> All the same, it is notable that there is no evidence that Gherardesca ever asked for or needed permission to leave her cell. In fact, there is no suggestion that she answered to any religious superior at all. In effect, her life is virtually indistinguishable from the life of some laywomen, such as Umiliana dei Cerchi (d. 1246), who also lived semi-enclosed, prayed the divine office, received visitors, and left her cell. On the other hand, the nun Gherardesca's freedom to leave her cell stands in striking contrast to other laywomen, such as Verdiana of Castelfiorentino (d. 1242), who lived fully enclosed within a cell on her family's property.



Twelve of the twenty-three women remain laywomen throughout their lives. In many cases, however, they defy easy categorization because their religious choices often prove so unique. Ostensibly, the laywomen the easiest to classify are the six who were associated with a mendicant order, three with the Franciscans, and three others with the Dominicans.<sup>24</sup> Many secondary sources call such women "tertiaries," the name for men and women who belonged to one of the mendicant "third orders." Such terminology, however, proves problematic for two reasons. First, just two of these women, Umiliana dei Cerchi and Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297), both associated with the Franciscans, are explicitly identified in their *vitae* as having adopted the habit of a "Third Order."<sup>25</sup> Yet, even such a specific identification is vague in terms of what it actually reveals about the nature of the women's association with the mendicants or the women's day-to-day religious lifestyles. Pointing to so-called "third order" rules to discover details of their daily lives does little to clarify the situation. Francis of Assisi's *Letter to the Faithful* (aka *Exhortation*, which is often claimed as his "rule"<sup>26</sup> for at least his foundation of the Franciscan Third Order)<sup>27</sup> is little more than a series of general exhortations easily applicable to all pious Christians. Francis exhorts Christians to do penance, avoid vice, and love their neighbors.<sup>28</sup> Oft-cited rules for the "Order of Penance," such as the *Memoriale propositi*<sup>29</sup> (1221?) and Nicholas IV's *Supra montem* (1289),<sup>30</sup> are similarly unhelpful.<sup>31</sup> These are often claimed as Franciscan Third Order rules. However, it is worth noting that men and women identifying themselves as "brothers" or "sisters" of penance predate the mendicant orders by more than a century. So these rules, even if used by some lay people associated with the Franciscans, have far wider application beyond any single mendicant third order. Most notably, neither Umiliana dei Cerchi nor Margaret of Cortona conform to various prescriptions contained in these rules (as is the case, as well, for many brothers and sisters of penance). Neither, for example, seems to have gathered monthly for meetings with other women or men belonging to a third order. So, even when an identifiable classification such as "tertiary" or "third order" explicitly appears in the medieval sources, it is of limited help in defining the religious lifestyle of the individual in question. In other words, a

classification is clarifying only to the extent that the classification itself has clear parameters.

Second, identifying the mendicant-affiliated women or men as tertiaries or third order members is problematic because these terms often never appear in the Latin sources. Peter Crisci of Foligno (d. 1323), for example, is often called a Franciscan tertiary,<sup>32</sup> despite the fact that his fourteenth-century Dominican hagiographer, John Gorini, identified Peter simply as a layman who lived in a church.<sup>33</sup> Although Gorini likens Peter to Saint Dominic at one point, he never mentions a rule, third order, or any practices that would suggest Peter was a tertiary, much less a Franciscan tertiary at that.<sup>34</sup> The problem is more acute in the case of late medieval women, who were more likely to be lay penitents associated with the mendicant orders. Angela of Foligno (d. 1309) followed the "rule of Saint Francis," for example, but just what "rule" she means is never clear.<sup>35</sup> Although there are references to the divine office and to visits to churches in her lengthy book of revelations, there is no hint of the degree of regulation included in some of the surviving rules for mendicant lay associations or "third orders."<sup>36</sup> The problem with labeling Angela as a tertiary or member of a third order, despite her clear Franciscan associations, is that it suggests a degree of institutionalization and regularization absent in the medieval source. It is far more accurate to refer to Angela simply as a Franciscan "penitent," the term used in her *Book* and one that appropriately admits a wide range of behavior.

In fact, the lives of women associated with the same mendicant order often vary tremendously. While Angela of Foligno played the role of queen bee, with Franciscan friars buzzing around her ready to receive her divine revelations (and laywomen largely absent from her life), Umiliana dei Cerchi, whose *vita* assigns an important role to her Franciscan confessor, is principally surrounded by a network of laywomen, including blood-sisters, other relatives, and her step-mother. The tertiary Margaret of Cortona begins her penitential journey living near the friars, receiving their spiritual counsel, and passing on to them divine counsel. Later she moves away from the Franciscans—against their wishes—and receives most of her spiritual guidance from secular priests. Margaret never, however, severs ties completely with the friars or renounces her identity as a Franciscan



penitent. While Angela comes and goes as she wishes from her home, Umiliana and Margaret (in the last years of her life) are portrayed primarily as solitaries, leading semi-enclosed and protected lives. Isolation from "seculars" is, in fact, presented as an ideal in Margaret's *vita*.<sup>37</sup> Angela, Margaret, and Umiliana are all Franciscan lay penitents, but they are also free-lancers, leading self-styled religious lives, sometimes influenced or led by mendicants and sometimes teaching and guiding the mendicants themselves. One finds similar diversity among the Dominican-related women Margaret of Città di Castello, Villana delle Botti, and Catherine of Siena. Furthermore, these differences cannot be accounted for by simple chronology: the lifestyles of the mendicant-related women do not show increasing degrees of regularization and uniformity, paralleling some (in part, mythical) historical evolution of mendicant lay associations. Although the lives of these six women span the better part of two centuries, considering the periods in which they lived throws little light on the similarities and diversities among them.

#### UNAFFILIATED LAYWOMEN

If the six women associated with the Franciscans and Dominicans are hard to define, the religious identities of the six remaining laywomen are more enigmatic yet. The holy woman Bona of Pisa (d. 1207) is difficult to categorize, in part, because there are discrepancies among the early *vitae* that chronicle her life. The two principal traditions, however, seem to agree that Bona was closely tied to both the Canons Regular of Saint Martin, as some sort of oblate, and to the Barefoot monks of Saint Michael. She traveled extensively as a pilgrim, visiting both Santiago de Compostela and the Holy Land, where she resided for nine months with a male hermit. Just how solitary was her existence in Pisa is hard to know, but many people, lay people, clerics, and religious alike, consulted her for spiritual advice. She was known as well for her material charity.<sup>38</sup>

The other five laywomen share with Bona the unofficial status, bestowed on them by their contemporaries, as "holy women."<sup>39</sup> The complexity of identifying the religious status of such women or, perhaps better, the intrinsically nebulous character of their religious identities, has led scholars to describe the women by using terms

that acknowledge this very point; the women are “quasi-religious,” for example, or “paramonastics.”<sup>40</sup> Fully dedicated to the pursuit of holiness, they evince the same spectrum of religious lifestyles found among the mendicant-affiliated laywomen.

#### THE SHIFTING RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES OF HOLY WOMEN

Although I have already discussed five nuns and twelve laywomen, I have yet to name six other women for the simple reason that their shifting religious identities position them in more than one of these two classifications, each of which, as I have shown, can comprehend a range of behavior. Together with the laywomen Margaret of Città di Castello (d. 1320) and Aldobrandesca (Alda) of Siena (d. 1310), who also cycle through several lay religious lifestyles, there are then eight women out of my sample of twenty-three who shift between or among religious identities.<sup>41</sup> This is in marked contrast to their male contemporaries, who, by and large, join and remain within a single religious order following an approved rule their entire lives. As I have noted above, only two of the twenty-one men change their religious lifestyles.

Some of these women are known to us principally as “nuns” since that is how they ended or spent a significant portion of their lives. Clare of Assisi, for example, is most often identified as a nun and the founder of what became known, some ten years after her death, as the Order of Saint Clare. Recent research shows fairly conclusively, however, that San Damiano, the house Clare helped found, began as a group of lay penitents who, quite possibly, wanted to remain as such. Following Francis of Assisi’s death in 1226, however, Pope Gregory IX moved to incorporate San Damiano within an order of monastic women that he himself had founded. In the process, he made San Damiano, famous for its association with Francis and Clare, the flagship of his order. Thomas of Celano’s *First Life* of Francis of Assisi, commissioned by Gregory himself, goes so far as to call San Damiano the place where the order of Poor Ladies originated.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that Gregory’s network of monasteries existed even before he subjected San Damiano to the Rule of Benedict and to his own Constitutions. His regularization of San Damiano converted the “poor ladies” there from penitents into nuns



and allied them formally with the monasteries he had already brought under his control. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Clare herself was reluctant to accept this new religious status and regularization.<sup>43</sup> Although she would fight admirably for the rest of her life to preserve San Damiano's right to live without regular income or possessions, in contrast to the other monasteries in this new order, the women of San Damiano would definitively lose their "privilege of poverty" just ten years after Clare's death when Pope Urban IV imposed a new rule on the Poor Ladies. While regularization removed some of the independent features of their life, there is little doubt that it also brought increased fame and influence, along with enhanced economic stability, not only to San Damiano, but also to the many monasteries allied with it.

The Dominican Raymond of Capua describes another nun in his *vita* of Agnes of Montepulciano (d. 1317). Raymond so stresses Agnes's Dominican credentials that some scholars have concluded, erroneously, that Agnes began her religious life as a Dominican, even though she first resided in a house of consecrated virgins, subject to a bishop.<sup>44</sup> The second house, founded by Agnes herself in Proceno, had no clear affiliation. Only her third residence and second foundation, a house in Montepulciano which began as a diocesan foundation, became a Dominican monastery.<sup>45</sup> Although Agnes had attained a degree of fame for holiness in her own lifetime—hence the opportunities afforded to her to found two religious houses—it is no doubt her Dominican affiliation that accounts for her lasting fame and influence. For without it, Raymond would not have troubled to write about Agnes, presenting her as a model of Dominican female holiness.

Other women cycle through a sequence of different religious lifestyles, changing more dramatically than Clare of Assisi or Agnes of Montepulciano. Humility of Faenza (d. 1310), for example, is regularly described as a Vallombrosan nun, but this was only the last in a series of religious life choices. According to an early Latin *vita*, after nine years of marriage, she first dedicated herself full-time to religious life in the Cluniac monastery of Saint Perpetua near Faenza (where her husband became an extern brother).<sup>46</sup> Following the directive of a heavenly voice, Humility surreptitiously escaped from that monastery

at some point (leaving her husband behind) and took temporary refuge with the Order of Saint Clare.<sup>47</sup> She then tried the solitary life, locked in a room of a relative, Niccolò, who took pity on her. Perhaps wanting his room back, Niccolò hit upon the idea—and convinced the authorities—that Humility continue her religious life in a cell alongside his local church and its male Vallombrosan monastery.<sup>48</sup> She lived enclosed there for twelve years (her husband followed her and promised obedience to both the abbot and to Humility, although he never saw her again).<sup>49</sup> The early Italian *vita* and the Latin *vita* diverge somewhat on the circumstances behind Humility's next move. It appears that many other women—too many for the Vallombrosan monks' liking—joined (or wanted to join) Humility in cells alongside hers. Hence, the religious authorities requested that Humility leave her cell to build and lead a monastery of women subject to the Vallombrosan abbot.<sup>50</sup> After what appears to be a fairly substantial period of time, Humility left that monastery in Faenza to found another Vallombrosan monastery of women in Florence.<sup>51</sup>

Humility's two hagiographers, probably both Vallombrosans,<sup>52</sup> put a decidedly teleological spin on these shifting affiliations, suggesting they were all designed to culminate in her regular monastic Vallombrosan life. One suspects, however, that there might be other motives as well behind her many moves. Cautiously reading between the lines of the *vitae*, it seems that Humility never fit in with the nuns of her first monastery who had some fun at her expense and were perhaps daunted by her exceptional piety.<sup>53</sup> Her flight from Saint Perpetua's monastery was absolutely illegal, a fact ignored by her Latin hagiographer but tackled straight-on by her Italian hagiographer. He writes at some length about the Clarisse abbess's shock when Humility appeared at the monastery door. The abbess immediately contacted three parties—Humility's husband (still at Saint Perpetua's), Saint Perpetua's prior, and Humility's uncle, Niccolò, apparently known to the Clarisse abbess.<sup>54</sup> Canon law allowed nuns and monks to change only to a stricter form of religious life: this regulation may lie behind Humility's enclosure, under lock and key, within Niccolò's house, followed by her enclosure outside the male Vallombrosan monastery. If so—and one must acknowledge the speculative nature of such a conclusion—her eventual success as



a holy woman who attracted enough other women to found her own Vallombrosan monastery in Faenza, would have constituted a sort of liberation from these solitary enclosures. Indeed, the *vitae* note in passing that Humility traveled as far as Rome in her new role as abbess.<sup>55</sup> But perhaps community life in Faenza—even with the possibility of occasional travel—was not freedom enough. After all, Faenza was the place where Humility first escaped from St. Perpetua's monastery, followed by her (possibly forcible) confinement in her relative's house, and then enclosure alongside the male Vallombrosan monastery. These moves may well have made her a controversial figure in Faenza. Thus her next move, away from Faenza, could well have constituted another sort of escape. Its secret and rushed nature suggests as much. The *vitae* imply that she herself had a hand in choosing the site for her second monastery, first planned for Venice, but then redirected (in a vision, by John the Evangelist) to Florence. Having received this celestial command, Humility secretly called a few of the sisters together. She turned the monastery over to the prioress and promptly left with her chosen cohort, who took absolutely nothing with them and had to make their way through war-torn lands. Although the *vitae* state that the Florentine prelates, religious, and laity received Humility joyously, one must wonder since they seemed to have lent her little help in the actual foundation and construction of her monastery. It was two years before Humility acquired land for the house, and then she herself had to collect stones for the actual building. Just how desperate she was for assistance appears in a story about a miracle she performed: in exchange for bringing a boy near death back to life, she asked the two women who had brought him to her to help her collect more stones for the building.<sup>56</sup> Lacking the types of documentation used by McLaughlin in her discussion of Corpus Domini, such a reconstruction of events surrounding Humility's religious trajectory must remain speculative. But surely there is more to the story behind her many moves than that provided by her pious hagiographers.

#### THE QUESTION OF AUTONOMY

Many of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women seem to resemble McLaughlin's pious laywomen in their search for a modicum of independence. It is a trope of medieval hagiography for

holy little girls to resist marriage so that they can take Christ as their spouse. Six of the women I am discussing were married, four of whom became mothers, along with the unmarried Margaret of Cortona who bore a child out of wedlock.<sup>57</sup> The fact that so many of the women in my sample were sexually active before embarking on the religious life is noteworthy, a sign of slowly changing mores regarding sanctity and its broadened accessibility to laywomen and men. Nevertheless, spouses, lovers, and children, especially for women, continued to be seen as obstacles in the pursuit of perfection. While Margaret of Cortona's lover and some holy women's husbands conveniently died, freeing the women to dedicate themselves fully to religious life, other women had to win their freedom by persuading their husbands to accept chastity and join them in religious life.<sup>58</sup>

Hagiographers depict women's desires to free themselves from marital and sexual relationships in overtly religious terms: escape from their earthly bonds liberated them for another kind of bondage as *sponsae Christi* and *ancillae Domini*. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive in a few of these cases the possibility that the women were relieved to be free of their families for more than merely religious reasons. There is circumstantial evidence in Angela of Foligno's *Book*, for example, that opens the possibility that her husband mistreated her.<sup>59</sup> Umiliana dei Cerchi poses a much clearer case. To be sure, her piety would have tested the patience of almost any husband. She stole clothes, food, and bedding from her family so that she could care for the poor, and she entirely neglected her children.<sup>60</sup> As a consequence, Umiliana was both verbally and physically abused in her home. Umiliana's Latin hagiographer, Vito of Cortona, does not name any of her domestic abusers, but her husband figures most prominently in his discussion of Umiliana's thefts: she even stole his own clothes.<sup>61</sup> Vito casts Umiliana as a veritable martyr "wounded by injuries [or "insults"] and upbraided verbally by both great and small in her house. Sometimes she was even beaten on account of her pious deeds."<sup>62</sup> After her husband's death, Umiliana returned to her paternal home where her father, brothers, and other relatives threatened and harassed her (unsuccessfully) to marry a second time.<sup>63</sup> Through legal subterfuge, her father then tricked her out of her dowry.<sup>64</sup> One can only wonder when Umiliana later counsels would-be solitaries to



see their family members as wild forest animals, to what extent her advice grew from her own actual experience.<sup>65</sup> Umiliana lived virtually independent from her father and brothers once she withdrew to a cell in a tower on the family property (where her father had threatened to put her anyway for refusing to marry).<sup>66</sup> The details of this one woman's family life suggest that religious life sometimes represented not only a spiritual flight to God, but also a physical flight to earthly independence from patriarchal and abusive households.

### FOLLOW THE MONEY

McLaughlin's commitment to follow the money in the story of Corpus Domini suggests the last line of inquiry I pursue in exploring the religious choices of these earlier women. There is evidence regarding the class background for twenty-two of the women. Of the ten women who ended their lives as nuns, seven likely came from wealthy and influential families.<sup>67</sup> Ten of the twelve laywomen came from either poor families or families of the prospering urban classes.<sup>68</sup>

Certainly the role of dowries continued to be fundamentally important for women wishing to become nuns. This is transparent in the life of Ubaldesca of Pisa (d. 1207), one of the three women who joined a group of nuns, but, exceptionally, came from a poor family. An angel of God told her to go to Pisa to live "in great penance" with nuns living under the Rule of Saint John. Ubaldesca reacted with disbelief, remarking to the angel that the nuns would not accept her since her parents were too poor to provide a dowry. But the angel retorted that Ubaldesca's doubts were unfounded: the nuns sought "neither money nor nobility, but virtue."<sup>69</sup> If, at first, Ubaldesca thought this meant she was to be received on an equal footing with the other nuns, as Gabriele Zaccagnini believes, she was sadly mistaken. Although the abbess clothed Ubaldesca in "nun's robes," the holy girl's role in the monastery was to obey, serve, and care for the forty other sisters. Furthermore, since the monastery was itself poor, Ubaldesca asked for and was given permission to go out each day and beg for the sisters.<sup>70</sup> Ubaldesca's hagiographer plays up her own humble choice to serve the other sisters in these ways, but it is hard to conclude that her service was anything other than a condition of her acceptance. Although she brought no dowry, she more than

earned her keep as a serving sister within the monastery. Clearly, economics—not just God—had a hand in determining the forms of religious life adopted by pious women like Ubaldesca. The case of the laywoman Umiliana dei Cerchi similarly highlights the role of dowries. After her husband died, she wanted to enter the monastery of Poor Ladies at Santa Maria of Monticelli. Umiliana's hagiographer claims that God refused to permit this so that she could shine in the world as a member of the Franciscan Third Order. But it is likely that the real reason Umiliana never became a nun is simply that she had no dowry, her father having defrauded her of it shortly before she asked to join the Poor Ladies.<sup>71</sup>

The quest for economic and institutional stability often prompted houses of laywomen to seek incorporation into a recognized religious order even though this may not have been their first preference. In 1279, the commune of Lucca granted a house to Christiana of Santa Croce (d. 1310). There she founded a community of simple laywomen who adopted the habit "of the order of Saint Francis." What happened between then and 1294, when records show that they had become "nuns of the Order of Saint Augustine"? Reginaldo Grégoire thinks the change was prompted by the anti-Franciscan bent of the Roman Curia. In addition, the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 had issued a resounding decree against "all the forms of religious life and the mendicant orders" founded after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and not approved by the papacy. Franciscan-inspired houses like Christiana's could easily come under suspicion of falling outside the bounds of an approved religious order.<sup>72</sup> Franciscan men, furthermore, were certainly unfriendly to women describing themselves as members of the "order of Saint Francis."<sup>73</sup> Thus, multiple pressures probably prompted Christiana's community to accept the safety, the legitimacy, and the more likely stream of income ensured by becoming nuns in the Order of Saint Augustine. Notably, these same women enshrined in their Constitutions certain features of their Franciscan heritage regarding fasting, work, and their habit.<sup>74</sup>

The lay house that Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308) joined followed another trajectory in its quest for economic stability and ecclesiastical recognition. The commune of Montefalco, overwhelmed



by religious houses in need of support, put obstacles in the women's way when they moved and began to construct a larger building nearer to the town in 1281. The women's enemies vociferously opposed them, doing whatever they could to impoverish the women and impede construction of their house. Clare and others took to begging in the streets so the women could eat.<sup>75</sup> It seems that these and other ecclesiastical pressures finally impelled the women to ask for a rule. While saints' *vitae* often use rules to praise particular orders or at least particular rules, it is clear in Clare's *vita* that the women would accept any rule at all. What rule they were given was immaterial; that they were given a rule was not. In 1290, their bishop gave them the Rule of Augustine, at which point their house, which had been called a *recluserium* became a "monastery," and their superior, who had been known as *rectrix*, received the title "abbess."<sup>76</sup> Clare's hagiographer makes much of this change, but it is notable that the women's religious life before and after regularization seems exactly the same. They were enclosed, wore habits, prayed the office, and so forth. Moreover, their closest associates and confessors continued to be Franciscan friars, many of whom are named and discussed at length in the *vita* and in the process for Clare's canonization.<sup>77</sup> The real change wrought by the women's acceptance of a rule was their ability to defend themselves as bona fide religious and to attract a more reliable stream of donations for the support of their house.

## CONCLUSION

What conclusions might we draw from the startling differences demarcating late medieval Tuscan and Umbrian women's religious life from that of their male contemporaries? Above all, we must consider the extent to which women's religious life choices were influenced and circumscribed by the lack of approved mendicant orders for women. Women of this region, like men, were avid to take part in the vast *vita apostolica* movement prevalent since the eleventh century. The stunning diversity, lack of regularization, and instability of their religious lives—the features that most distinguish them from their male counterparts—would have been dramatically reduced if they had been able to enjoy the security afforded by the mendicant orders. These offered the very opportunities for apostolic service, alternation

between separation from and insertion in the world, freedom of movement, and devotional practices that many of the women I have discussed evidently sought. But at the very moment that the hierarchical church was encouraging the expansion and prestige of the male mendicant orders, it was moving to restrict the freedom of houses of female penitents, forcing them to accept one of the approved religious rules, and making new pronouncements regarding the strict enclosure of monastic women. Beguines to the north of Italy, who so resembled many of the women in this study, were similarly encountering the hardened attitudes and even condemnations of religious and civil authorities against women "on the loose."<sup>78</sup>

Women who wanted to emulate the religious lifestyles of famed mendicants such as Francis of Assisi and Dominic of Guzman or locally-admired penitents such as Margaret of Cortona and Angela of Foligno had no clear choices available to them that would garner the ecclesiastical recognition and economic stability that the mendicant orders extended to their members. Poor and middle-class women in the vibrant urban milieux of Tuscany and Umbria, unable to produce the dowries required by most monastic foundations, had to forge their own religious lifestyles, sometimes as recluses attached to male monasteries, sometimes as holy women supported *ad hoc* by admiring mendicants or others, and sometimes in struggling houses of lay penitents. All too often they were subject to the sorts of unplanned changes endemic to a precarious, officially unsanctioned, and economically unsupported religious lifestyle. Wealthy women with sufficient means to enter a monastic foundation, as I have shown above, also sometimes seemed to have preferred the more liberated life of a semi-enclosed recluse or the relative independence of a religious house of lay penitents. Mendicant orders for women would not, of course, have answered the desires of every woman in this study. Some yearned for seclusion and regularization, much as did some of the women in McLaughlin's *Corpus Domini*. This is not, therefore, a simple story of a controlling male hierarchy refusing to allow pious women the same latitude in their religious choices that they allowed to mendicant men.

Nevertheless, as the lives of these women show, most women shared and sought to live out the same apostolic ideals of penitence, poverty, and preaching by word or example that their male



counterparts pursued with far greater ease and security as members of the mendicant orders. Male-authored *vitae* about women (and men) often prove recalcitrant in answering the questions that we bring to them. But as well-documented studies like Mary McLaughlin's case of Corpus Domini show in some detail, the forms of religious life women adopted often involved painful choices among competing values. The same certainly seems to be the case for the less-documented thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women of Tuscany and Umbria. Sharing many of the religious ideals of their medieval male counterparts, they sought to achieve them in the face of far greater challenges. In this respect, these late medieval women seem to have even more in common with their fifteenth-century sisters, for with them they shared both ideals and challenges.

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#### END NOTES

1. Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Creating and Recreating Communities of Women: The Case of Corpus Domini, Ferrara, 1406-1452," *Signs* 14.2 (1989): 293-320.
2. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," p. 298.
3. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," p. 300.
4. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," p. 299. The phrase McLaughlin cites is from Bernardina's instructions, Archivio del monastero del Corpus Domini, Ferrara, Cartella A, n. 8, n. 14, April 3, 1425.
5. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," pp. 296-99, 304, 309.
6. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," pp. 300-303.
7. Cited in McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," p. 316; see also pp. 306-307, 311-17. Although Caterina Vegri apparently disliked Verde Pio's interventions in Corpus Domini, Vegri would later, in 1456, found a reformed Clarisse monastery in Bologna that conformed to the religious life Verde Pio advocated for Corpus Domini in Ferrara. Known also as Corpus Domini, the Bolognese establishment was a house of strict monastic observance and, therefore, exemplary in the eyes of the church hierarchy.
8. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," pp. 304-310.
9. This number excludes individuals described as "blessed" or "saint" or "holy" (another translation for *sancta* and *sanctus*) in the chronicles of specific religious orders that are naturally inclined to include as many holy individuals in their ranks as possible; e.g. *Chronica XXIV Generalium*; in *Analecta franciscana* III (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1897).
10. Franciscans: Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), Benvenuto of Gubbio (d. 1232), Ambrose of Massa (d. 1240), Guido of Cortona (d. 1247), Simon of Collazzone (d. 1250), Giles of Assisi (d. ca. 1261), Conrad of Offida (d. 1306), Jacopone of Todi

- (d. 1306). John of Alverna (d. 1322) was first a Canon Regular of the Order of Saint Augustine, and then became a Franciscan. Hermits of Saint Augustine: Augustine Novello of Siena (d. 1309), Simon Fidati of Cascia (d. 1348). Servites: Phillip Benizius (d. 1285), Joachim of Siena (d. 1306), Alex Falconieri (d. 1310), Francis of Siena (d. 1328). Dominican: Ambrose Sansedoni of Siena (d. 1286). Gesuato: John Colombini (d. 1367).
11. Peter the Comb Maker (d. 1289), James the Almsgiver of Città della Pieve (d. 1304?).
12. Peter Crisci of Foligno (d. 1323).
13. Torello of Poppi (d. 1282).
14. Sperandea of Gubbio (d. ca. 1276), Giovanna (Vanna) of Orvieto (d. 1306), Margaret of Faenza (d. 1330).
15. Gherardesca of Pisa (d. 1270) and Ubaldesca of Pisa (d. 1207), whom I discuss later in this essay.
16. McLaughlin, "Corpus Domini," p. 299.
17. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana," par. 4, *Acta sanctorum* (hereafter AASS), May, vol. 7 (Paris and Rome, 1866). The phrase, *sacra Religionis habitum*, might also be translated as the "habit of their holy Order."
18. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana": "volebat assumere habitum ejusdem monasterii" (par. 4); "postquam persensit se sanctimonialibus vestibus adornatam" (par. 5).
19. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana," par. 5, 13, 14, 48, 51, 62, 64, 66, and 74.
20. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana," par. 5; see Cécile Caby, *De l'érémisme rural au monachisme urbain: Les camaldules en Italie à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1999).
21. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana," par. 6, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32; see also 27; and see Caby, *Les camaldules en Italie*, pp. 151-55; and *Consuetudo Camaldulensis: Rodulphi Constitutiones, Liber eremitice regule: edizione critica e traduzione*, ed. Pierluigi Licciardello (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004).
22. Monk of San Savino, "De B. Gerardesca Pisana": visits to churches (par. 13, 27); visits to monks at another monastery or other monasteries (par. 29, 60; cf. 49-52, 54).
23. Cécile Caby, "La sainteté féminine camaldule au moyen âge: autour de la b. Gherardesca de Pisa," *Hagiographica* 1 (1994): 235-69.
24. Franciscan-related: Umiliana dei Cerchi (d. 1246), Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297), Angela of Foligno (d. 1309). Dominican-related: Margaret of Città di Castello (d. 1320), Villana delle Botti (d. 1361), Catherine of Siena (d. 1380).
25. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," AASS, May, vol. 4 (Paris and Rome, 1866), par. 11, p. 388; Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda de vita et miraculis beatae Margaritae de Cortona*, ed. Fortunato Iozzelli (Grottaferatta [Rome]: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1997), pp. 181 (8), 260 (525-27).
26. Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order: The Franciscan and Pre-Franciscan Penitential Movement* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1989).
27. Kajetan Esser, "Ein Vorläufer der 'Epistola ad fideles' des hl. Franziskus von Assisi (Doc. 225 der Biblioteca Guarnacci zu Volterra)," *Collectanea Franciscana* 45 (1975): 5-37 [Eng. trans. in *Analecta TOR* 14 (1978)]; see Margaret Carney,



- "The 'Letter' of Fourteen Names: Reading 'The Exhortation,'" in *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents*, ed. Jay M. Hammond (New York: New City, 2004), pp. 90-104, for an overview of scholarly assessments of Francis's "Exhortation" and the text's various titles.
28. "Epistola ad fideles (Recensio prior)" and "Epistola ad fideles (Recensio posterior)," in *Fontes franciscani*, ed. Enrico Menestò and Stefano Brufani, and Giuseppe Cremascoli et al. (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncula, 1995), pp. 71-76 and 77-86, respectively. On the relationship between the two texts and the intended audience, see Théophile Desbonnets, "Aspect historique et critique des écrits de François," in Francis of Assisi, *Écrits*, ed. Kajetan Esser, trans. Théophile Desbonnets et al. (Paris: Cerf, 1981; rev. ed., 2003), pp. 33-34. Thomas of Celano, *Vita prima* 37, refers to Francis renewing the church in both sexes according to his form, rule, and teaching [*formam, regulam et doctrinam*], but whether this refers to a written rule cannot be known since no such text survives beyond these two recensions of his "Letter to the Faithful."
29. Leonhard Lemmens, "Regula antiqua Ordinis de Poenitentia (1221) iuxta novum codicem," *Archivum franciscanum historicum* 6 (1913): 245-50; Benvenuto Bughetti, "Prima Regula Tertii Ordinis iuxta novum codicem," *Archivum franciscanum historicum* 14 (1921): 114-21.
30. In *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum Romanorum pontificum Taurinensis editio*, vol. 4 (1859), pp. 90-95.
31. Placid Hermann, "The Rule of the Third Order (1221)," in *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig, 4th ed. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983), pp. 165-68.
32. M. Faloci Pulignani, "Un terziario francescano sconosciuto," *Miscellanea francescana* 6 (1896): 137; Rodolfo Toso d'Arenzano, "Cresci, Pietro, da Foligno, beato," *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, 12 vols. (Rome: Istituto Giovanni XXIII nella Pontificia Università lateranense, 1961-1970), vol. 4, col. 293; and see Lorenzo Di Fonzo, "I beati francescani di Foligno tra santità e riforma religiosa, 1230-1860," *Miscellanea francescana* 90 (1990): 613.
33. John Gorini's *vita* of Peter appears in two partial and complementary editions: "Beati Petri de Fulgineo," in *Analecta Bollandiana* 8 (1889): 365-69; and "Vita S. Petri Fulgini," AASS, July, vol. 4 (Paris and Rome, 1868), pp. 663-68.
34. "Vita S. Petri Fulgini," chap. 1, par. 5, p. 666.
35. Angela of Foligno and Brother A., the *Memorial*, in *Il libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. Ludger Thier and Abele Calufetti (Grottaferrata [Rome]: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1985), chap. 3, p. 178.
36. Pope Nicholas IV's 1289 *Supra montem*, for example, issued for the "brothers" and "sisters" in the "order of penance" clearly regulated matters such as entrance, clothing, monthly meetings, and Franciscan oversight of sisters and brothers belonging to a lay order of penance. On the gradual evolution of the brothers and sisters of penance and their relationship to the mendicant orders, see *Dossier de l'Ordre de la pénitence au XIIIe siècle*, ed. G. G. Meersseman, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Fribourg: Editions universitaires, 1982).
37. An anonymous female companion of Angela is mentioned several times in the *Memorial*. Evidence of Franciscan friars devoted to Angela can be found in the *Instructions*, composed by Angela's followers. The *Instructions* are part two of *Il libro della Beata Angela da Foligno*. See n. 25 for the *vitae* of Umiliana and Margaret.



38. For her *vitae* and a discussion of her life, see Gabriele Zaccagnini, *La tradizione agiografica medievale di santa Bona da Pisa* (Pisa: GISEM-Edizioni ETS, 2004).
39. They include Ubaldesca of Pisa, Verdiana of Castelfiorentino, Josefina (Fina) of San Gimignano, Zita of Lucca, Joan of Signa, and Aldobrandesca (Alda) of Siena.
40. E.g., "quasi-religious": Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), p. 18, *passim*; Elizabeth M. Makowski, "A Pernicious Sort of Woman": *Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic UP, 2005). "Paramonastic": Silvestro Nessi, "Spiritualità femminile penitenziale in Umbria nel secolo XIII," in *Vita e spiritualità della Beata Angela da Foligno*, ed. Clément Schmitt (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 1987), p. 140 ("vita... paramonastica").
41. The six others are Clare of Assisi (d. 1253), Clare of Montefalco (d. 1308), Christiana of Santa Croce (Oringa Menabuoi) (d. 1310), Humility of Faenza (d. 1310), Agnes of Montepulciano (d. 1317), and Justina (Francucci Bizzoli) of Arezzo (d. 1319). Margaret of Cortona, who retains her identity as a member of the Franciscan Third Order throughout her life, is also notable in terms of her shift from a penitential life of prayer and charitable works within the city of Cortona to a mostly solitary life on a hill overlooking the city in the last decade of her life.
42. Thomas of Celano, *Vita prima* 18.
43. Maria Pia Alberzoni, *Chiara e il papato* (Milan: Edizioni Biblioteca Francescana, 1995) [Eng. trans. in *idem*, *Clare and the Poor Sisters in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Jean-François Godet-Calogeras (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2004)].
44. E.g. Guglielmo Di Agresti, "Agnese da Montepulciano," in *Bibliotheca sanctorum*, vol. 1, col. 375-76.
45. Raymond of Capua, *Legenda beate Agnetis de Monte Policiano*, ed. Silvia Nocentini, Pt. 1, chap. 1, p. 8; Pt. 2, chap. 1-2, pp. 39-43; and see Nocentini, pp. xxii-xxiii.
46. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 11; Silvestro Ardeni, *Vita di Umiltà*, chap. 7; both in *Le Vite di Umiltà da Faenza: Agiografia trecentesca dal latino al volgare*, ed. Adele Simonetti (Florence: SISMELE-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1997).
47. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 15-16; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 11-12.
48. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 18-19; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 12-13.
49. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 21, 24; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 15, 17.
50. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 23, 25; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 19-20.
51. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 37-40; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 39-40.
52. Simonetti, *Le Vite di Umiltà da Faenza*, p. xi.
53. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 6; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 9.
54. Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 12.
55. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 33; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 27.
56. Biagio, *Vita sancte Humilitatis*, par. 37, 39-40; Ardeni, *Umiltà*, chap. 40-41.
57. Married: Umiliana dei Cerchi, Gherardesca of Pisa, Angela of Foligno, Alda of Siena, Humility of Faenza, Villana delle Botti. Children: Umiliana dei Cerchi, Margaret of Cortona, Angela of Foligno, Humility of Faenza, Villana delle Botti.
58. Those whose husbands or lover die: Umiliana dei Cerchi, Margaret of Cortona, Angela of Foligno, Alda of Siena. Those whose husbands agree to enter religious life: Gherardesca of Pisa, Humility of Faenza.
59. Catherine M. Mooney, "The Changing Fortunes of Angela of Foligno,



Daughter, Mother and Wife," in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger (New York: Columbia UP, 2007).

60. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 1-6, pp. 386-87.

61. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 2-3, p. 386.

62. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 5, pp. 386-87: "O quantis dilacerata injuriis et exprobrata verbis, a magnis et parvis domus! Erat etiam verberata aliquando propter opera pietatis."

63. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 7, p. 387.

64. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 8, p. 387.

65. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 25, pp. 391-92.

66. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 13, p. 389; par. 37, pp. 394-95.

67. Clare of Assisi, Gheradesca of Pisa, Sperandea of Gubbio, Clare of Montefalco, Humility of Faenza, Agnes of Montepulciano, and Margaret of Faenza.

68. Bona of Pisa, Verdiana of Castelfiorentino, Umiliana dei Cerchi, Fina of San Gimignano, Zita of Lucca, Margaret of Cortona, Joan of Signa, Angela of Foligno, Villana delle Botti, and Catherine of Siena.

69. *Vita della beatissima uergine Ubaldesca*, par. 3, pp. 170-71, in *Ubaldesca, una santa laica nella Pisa dei secoli XII-XIII*, ed. Gabriele Zaccagnini (Pisa: GISEM-Edizioni ETS, 1995).

70. *Vita della beatissima uergine Ubaldesca*, par. 4-5, pp. 171-72; and see Zaccagnini, *Ubaldesca, una santa laica*, pp. 49-53, esp. 53 n. 32.

71. Vito of Cortona, "De B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana," par. 8, p. 387; par. 11, p. 388.

72. Reginaldo Grégoire, "Il volto storico di s. Cristiana (d. 1310)," *Recollectio* 6 (1983): 7-8.

73. Lezlie Knox, "Audacious Nuns: Institutionalizing the Franciscan Order of Saint Clare," *Church History* 69 (2000): 41-62.

74. Grégoire, "Il volto storico di s. Cristiana," *Recollectio* 6 (1983): 8-9.

75. Berengar of S. Africano, *Vita sanctae Clarae de Cruce ordinis eremitarum s. Augustini*, ed. Alfonsus Semenza (Città del Vaticano, 1944), pp. 12-13.

76. Berengar, *Vita sanctae Clarae*, pp. 17-18.

77. *Il Processo di canonizzazione di Chiara da Montefalco*, ed. Enrico Menestò (Perugia: Regione dell'Umbria; Florence: Nuova Italia, 1984).

78. See Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2001), esp. chap. 5.